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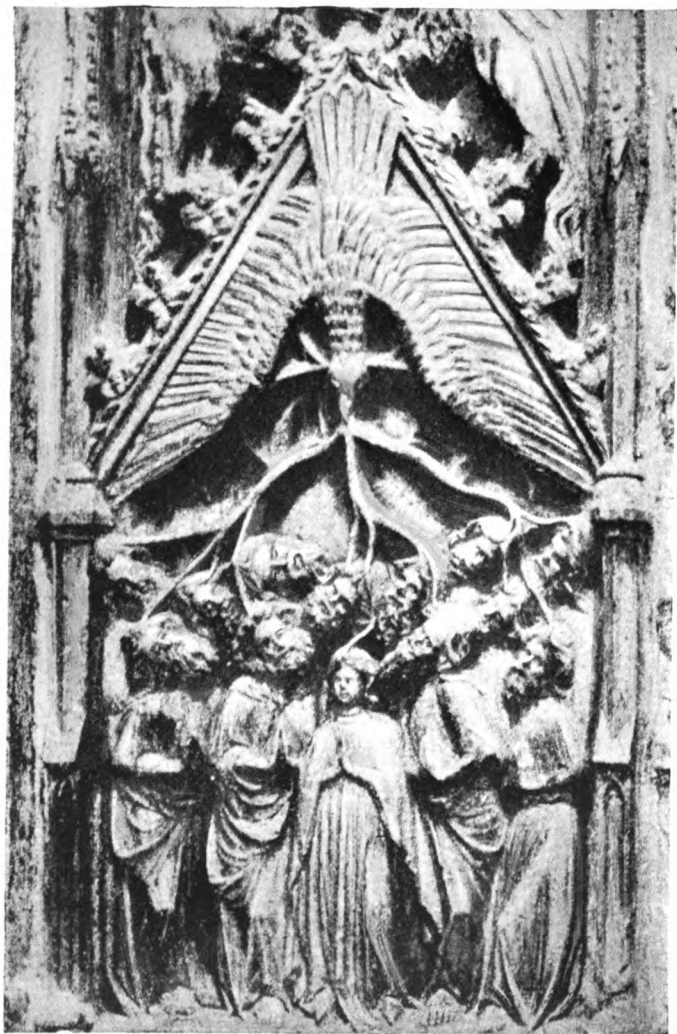


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**THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

*Carving in the Church of Corneilla-le-Confluent, E. Pyrenees.*

**Frontispiece.**

# CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

## *Some Notes on their Origin and Meaning*

BY

KATHERINE KENNEDY

*Author of "The Crucifix"*

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND DIAGRAMS*

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# CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS



## CHAPTER I

### *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE*

“Beneath this world of stars and flowers  
That rolls in visible deity  
I dream another world is ours  
And is the soul of all we see.

How far below the depth of being,  
How wide beyond the starry bound  
It rolls unconscious and unseeing,  
And is as Number or as Sound.”

AGNES M. F. DUCLAUX, in  
*The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse.*

IN the year 1098 S. Robert, Abbot of Molesme, with twenty of his monks, set forth from the gateway of that Benedictine house on a journey to Citeaux, where he founded the Cistercian Order. The aim of the little company was to keep more strictly, and in greater simplicity, the Holy Rule of S. Benedict, and their going forth was a silent protest against the elaborations of ritual and life which wealth had brought upon

B

the Order. The Cistercians spread rapidly, proving that in the eleventh century, as in every other, there were religious people to whom CHRIST alone—His words, His life, and death—uninterpreted by nature or art, was all-in-all. We read that in early Cistercian churches stone bell-towers were forbidden, or even wooden towers of excessive height ; the windows were of clear glass, paintings (except painted wooden crucifixes) were forbidden, and vestments and ornaments were as plain as dignity would allow.

In speaking of symbols and symbolism it must be admitted at the outset that the mental cleavage thus exemplified appears incessantly through the history of Christianity. There are men to whom all things visible are symbols—prisms reflecting to them some one hue from the white radiance of God's glory. There are others who see not so much God in all things as all things in God, needing no lesser revelation than He has given us in the life and death of CHRIST. The Perfect Man showed, if we may say so reverently, both types of mind. He could say "No man cometh to the FATHER but by Me ;" but He also said of Himself "I am the Vine, the Good Shepherd, the True Bread, the Sower, the Light of the World." He chose Apostles of both types—S. Paul, determined to know nothing but JESUS

CHRIST and Him crucified, who rarely uses symbolism in his teaching ; and S. John, who so absorbed the symbolism of his native Jewish Church that through it, modified by the teaching of his Master, he was able to express to the world his Revelation.

Guided by Holy Writ, the English Church at the Reformation, while casting away much symbolism that had become strained and formal, sought to "keep the mean between the two extremes" in her rites and ceremonies. The use of certain symbols and symbolic acts, such as the ring in Matrimony, the sign of the Cross in Baptism, the gift of the Bible in Ordination, the standing of the priest to give Absolution, is definitely ordered. But the Church's general attitude towards the use of symbols has been a wide tolerance, and any attempt of parties in the Church to enforce a more detailed teaching on this point has always led to an outburst of Puritanism.

Yet even the Puritans who most affect to despise symbolism cannot avoid its use. Like other teachers they need illustration to enforce their teaching ; and what is the bareness of their churches but a symbol of that simplicity in religion which they claim as their own ? Or, what is the Quaker garb if not a symbol of a meek and quiet spirit ? Men who have gripped

great truths have so longed to impress them upon the world that they have seized upon every available means of doing so, and thus symbolism has ever been the handmaid of religion. It was not discovered by the Church. Symbolism, the language used by child-races, is older than history ; evoked by the first longing for expression, and used continually in all ages to enforce and express truths which are beyond words. The Old Testament shows that God Himself taught the world through symbols, and that even in the nomadic days of the half-civilized Israelites a man "filled with the Spirit of God . . . in all manner of workmanship," helped by "all that were wise-hearted," was commissioned to make the symbolical furniture of the Temple, "the patterns of things in the heavens."

The same symbols occur in widely separated ages and places, not because they were carried from place to place, or handed on from age to age ; but because man could only develop along certain lines, and found, on the whole, the same sources of inspiration and the same means of expression at his command. The Early Christians were often accused of borrowing their symbols, and also some of their sacraments and ceremonies, from their heathen neighbours. It is true that they adopted certain symbols which

had been used in older faiths, and the Catacombs show that Christians of the first century pictured Orpheus and Pan alongside the Good Shepherd as vehicles of Christian teaching.

Writers on comparative religion frequently point out, almost as a challenge to Christianity, that ceremonies very similar to our rites of Baptism and the Eucharist existed before the Christian era, and are still practised by certain primitive peoples. Many ancient races in various parts of the world have performed a ceremonial washing of infants or of initiates, which implied a cleansing from sin and a new birth unto righteousness. Moreover, infants were often named at this ceremony. S. John the Baptist certainly adopted an existing custom, which our LORD sanctified.

Many centuries before the birth of CHRIST the Egyptians had a ceremony of admittance into their religion, which was a strange foreshadowing of Christian Baptism as a death unto sin and a resurrection to a new life. The initiate was laid in a stone coffin with a cross upon his breast ; for even in those days the cross was the symbol of death as the gate of life. Lying thus, he was put into a trance for three days, after which the ceremony was completed. A custom of such spiritual significance seems especially

curious when practised by a people who, according to Herodotus, worshipped cats and crocodiles.

In Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Scandinavia, China, and other countries, blood-covenants and sacramental feasts of bread and wine by which priests or people, or both, partook of the life of the god, existed before the coming of Christianity.

These symbolic ceremonies may surely be regarded as examples of the divine guidance of human instincts—types and shadows which CHRIST came not to destroy but to fulfil. Bread, wine, water, the family meal expressing unity among the children of one father, things within reach of the simplest of mankind, gradually became types and illustrations of inexpressible spiritual realities. We may well adopt the attitude towards old ceremonies which a modern poet<sup>1</sup> ascribes to the Blessed Virgin :—

“Through His Boyhood, year by year  
Eating with Him the Passover,  
Didst thou discern confusedly  
That holier Sacrament when He  
The bitter cup about to quaff  
Should break the Bread and eat thereof?”

That, it seems, is the ideal way in which to regard symbols and symbolic ceremonies—as links with the childhood of the world, used in order that truth should dawn gradually upon

<sup>1</sup> D. G. Rossetti, *Avr.*

child-eyes ; and as foreshadowings of divine truths which as yet we can but dimly understand.

In this way the primitive Christian Church made use of symbols. She invented new ones, partly to conceal her truths from the uninitiated, partly to teach her children, and partly for purposes of recognition. She also adapted existing symbols to her own purposes, in order not to lose any truth which was already in the world. She knew the value of teaching through the eye. Sometimes, as in the Middle Ages, symbolism has run riot, driven by such an exaggerated reverence as led our forefathers to place a fish in the manger rather than portray the Infant CHRIST. Sometimes, as in the last century and in our own day, realism has gained the upper hand, and for a while has seemed likely to kill spirituality in our art. But two factors, the discovery of the instinct for learning through the eye, and the Catholic revival, have led to a renewed use of symbols in the structure and decoration of our churches. It is therefore advisable that we should study the origins of these symbols in order fully to absorb the old truths which they taught, or to adapt them, if necessary, to our present needs.



## CHAPTER II

### LETTERS AND NUMBERS

“Within the thought that cannot grasp Thee  
In its unfathomable hold,  
We worship Thee who may not clasp Thee,  
O God, unreckoned and untold!”

AGNES M. F. DUCLAUX, in  
*The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse.*

A CHILD was asked by her governess whether she knew the meaning of the monogram IHS on the cover of her Prayer Book. The reply came readily—“In His Service—to remind us to take care of it, because it’s a Church book.” She had followed a latent instinct in making her own meaning for a symbol which she did not understand, and for her the symbol had renewed its usefulness. Her governess, in correcting her, handed on a precisely similar error by her explanation that the letters stood for *Jesus Hominum Salvator*—Jesus, Saviour of men. These familiar letters are in reality an abbreviation of IHCOYC (the Greek form of JESUS) IHC. The Greek

capital  $\eta$  was gradually replaced by the minuscule form of the Latin H, and the line which indicated abbreviation became the bar of a cross, as we sometimes see it to-day (*ihs*). After the Renaissance the letters were often written as Latin capitals, the cross remaining as an ornament; and ignorant scribes, forgetting the original meaning, if they ever knew it, frequently put full stops between the letters, which thus came to be regarded as the initials of three separate words, *Jesus Hominum Salvator*.

Initials and monograms were favourite symbols among the early Christians, probably for the reason that their meanings were obvious to the initiated, and hidden from the heathen. The best known to us in these days is the XP, the first two letters of the Greek word *Χριστος*—Christos. Constantine in A.D. 326 adopted this monogram as his standard, and caused it to be placed on his coins, with the result that it was carried far and wide, and became famous throughout Europe—so much so that it was for a time as well known an emblem of Christianity as the cross itself.

Other abbreviations of the Greek words for *Jesus* and *Christ* were also used very frequently, especially in early manuscripts, and are still to be found as ornaments; for example,  $\overline{\text{IC}}$   $\overline{\text{XC}}$ ,  $\overline{\text{IHC}}$

$\overline{\text{XPC}}$  and  $\overline{\text{IX}}$ . In the Orthodox Eastern Church  $\overline{\text{IC}} \overline{\text{XC}}$  NIKA (Jesus Christ conquers) is inscribed on every *eikon* or picture of CHRIST, and is stamped on every sacred wafer, as the monogram IHS is sometimes stamped on those of our own Church.

Occasionally the Christians would imitate the Gnostics in devising acrostic symbols, that is, using the initial letters of several words, and writing only the one word which these initials spelt, or drawing that which it represented. This explains the fish symbol so much beloved by the Early Church. The letters of the Greek word for "fish" are the initial letters of those for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour."

We in these days are learning again the use of symbols, and still content ourselves with very few. But the  $\overline{\text{XP}}$  monogram alone had many variations, each with its own special significance. Thus the  $\overline{\text{XP}}$  alone suggested the word CHRIST. The addition of another horizontal line suggested not only CHRIST but His Cross. Sometimes the P-loop was omitted, and the letters  $\overline{\text{IX}}$  left—the initials of JESUS CHRIST. Or the circle, symbol of eternity, might be added to either monogram, teaching either the eternal character of CHRIST or, in the second case, forming a wheel-cross, which represented to the heathen the sun, but to Christians JESUS CHRIST, the Eternal Light.



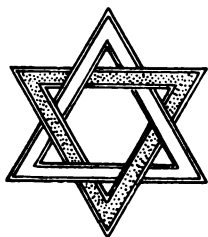
*SWASTIKA.*



*THE FISH AND ANCHOR.*



*DOVES, WITH ALPHA, OMEGA, AND XP MONOGRAM.*



*THE SHIELD OF DAVID.*



*INTERLACED CIRCLES.*



More rarely the Greek P (Rho) became a Latin R (for *Rex*), and we are reminded of CHRIST the King. More rarely still, the lower part of the monogram was surmounted by an N, and we remember that our LORD was a Nazarene; or we may take another interpretation, *Christos Noster*, a mingling of Greek and Latin which signifies "Our CHRIST," or "Our LORD JESUS CHRIST."

From very early times the Alpha and Omega (A and Ω), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, were often used alone or associated with the sacred monogram: "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, saith the LORD." These letters were also used very frequently upon the nimbus surrounding the head of our LORD—in early and mediaeval Christian art the nimbus often bore some letter descriptive of the wearer. Thus in a picture by Benozzo Gozzoli of the Madonna and Child surrounded by saints and angels the nimbi are all gold, inscribed with the wearer's name in black letters. In San Severino's picture of the Marriage of S. Catherine our LORD's nimbus bears the words *Sum Lux*, the Blessed Virgin's *Ave, gratia plena Domī*, and S. Catherine's *Santa Ktrina de Sena*. This mediaeval custom was probably a survival of the days when initials and monograms were used as symbols, and when any portrayal of our LORD's human face or form

was banned by the Church. Pictures of patriarchs and saints were always permitted, and this may explain why their initials and monograms (except M.R. (*Maria Regina*), which was introduced at a later date) are seldom if ever found.

Certain numerals and geometric figures very early acquired mysterious significances, which some of them have retained to this day. The figures 3, 7, 9 ( $3 \times 3$ ), and 10, for example, were all credited with peculiar qualities. 3 and 7 are associated with most of the counting-out games still played by children, which probably originated in some form of casting lots used by our primitive ancestors.

In Christian Symbolism 3 is symbolic of the Blessed Trinity, and as such it has come to us from those earlier religions which had a triad of gods. It occurs in numerous ways in our churches. Three doors represent our entry into the Church by faith in the Trinity; three windows, or one large window of three lights, show the light of the same faith, and three steps to the altar are another reminder of it. Similarly, two doors, a double window, two candles on the altar, or any other symbolic use of the figure 2, are representations of our LORD's two natures, human and divine. The pentalfa, or the five-pointed star, which is seen in the eastern window of the

south aisle of Westminster Abbey, is almost a unique instance of the use of the number 5 in symbolism. This figure was occasionally used by the Greeks and Jews in certain manuscripts.

From earliest times the number 7 has had a mystic meaning. It is the number of the seven planets, and of the seven stars—the Great Bear, guide of travellers—and to the ancient astrologers it was a symbol of perfection and sacrifice. To Christians it has many sacred connections ; it is the number of the days of the week, of the Words from the Cross, of the Gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT, of the Lamps before the Throne, of the Seals, of the Sacraments, the Penitential Psalms, the Cardinal Virtues, and the Deadly Sins. Regeneration has long been symbolized by 8, presumably because eight persons were saved from the Flood, though it bore this significance in divers ancient religions and divers places. For this reason most of the old fonts and baptisteries are octagonal. We associate 9 with the choirs of angels, and 10, as the number of the Commandments, is a symbol of the Old Dispensation. Sages and astrologers attached importance to 12 because there are twelve Signs of the Zodiac ; now it suggests to us completeness and perfection, because of the twelve Apostles—the princes of the king-



dom of heaven—and the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem. The sense of proportion and perfection is conveyed to us by 4, for “the city lieth four-square, and the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.”

For many centuries 15 has symbolized progress and ascent. There were fifteen steps to the Temple, and fifteen “Gradual Psalms” to be sung in ascending them. Also there are fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, leading the thoughts of worshippers from the Annunciation to the final glory of the saints in heaven.

Geometric symbolism also began in the dim ages, and is obviously capable of endless development. The greatest and oldest of symbols is two intersecting straight lines, the Cross, which has existed throughout the known history of the world. A small seal engraved with a cross was found by Sir Arthur Evans at Cnossos, where it was probably made some two thousand years before the birth of CHRIST. The cross has also been found in the ancient temples of Egypt, in India and Scandinavia, in Mexico and Peru. It is always a symbol of power and life.

The form of a cross is suggested by many natural objects—the wings of a bird outstretched in flight, the growth of trees, the markings of certain stones—and all plants belonging to the

botanical order *cruciferae* (plants bearing cross-shaped flowers) are not merely harmless, but are "kindly herbs," beneficial to men. "T" or some other form of cross is a letter of nearly every alphabet, ancient or modern; and in northern countries the significance of the cross was accentuated by its resemblance to Thor's hammer.

Our LORD foreshadowed the symbolic use of the cross by Christians when He bade His disciples take up the cross and follow Him. We have become so accustomed to the connection between CHRIST and the Cross that we can hardly realize how strange the metaphor must have seemed to its first hearers. The Early Church used the cross at first only as a gesture, to begin with as a secret sign of recognition between the members of a persecuted sect, and later, as we use it to-day, as a kind of acted prayer, dedication, or blessing. Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and other writers of the first three centuries, mention the frequency with which Christians used the sacred sign, which sanctified every action of life and strengthened the martyrs to meet death.

Many explanations have been given for the symbolism of the sign of the Cross, most of which were probably invented long after the use of the sign was an accepted fact. The following

interpretation by S. Ambrose is one of the most reasonable and beautiful :—

“ We make the sign of the Cross upon our forehead, that we may always be bold to confess ; upon our heart, that we may remember to love ; upon our arm, that we may be ready to work.”

The cross was rarely represented in Christian art until after the Emperor Constantine had adopted the ✠ monogram as his standard, and abolished crucifixion as a capital punishment. Before that time its associations were too painful, and the Christian Church in its days of suffering did not dwell so much on the sorrowful side of the Gospel story as on the love and power of their King “ Who is alive for evermore.” When the cross does appear on the walls of the Catacombs it is frequently disguised—sometimes as an anchor, the symbol of Hope—or it is in conjunction with the Good Shepherd or some other joyful picture. Occasionally it appears as the Tree of Life, or on the head of the Lamb as a diadem, or it stands at the summit of Mount Sion, with the four rivers flowing from it whereat “ the sheep of His hand ” quench their thirst.

The different forms of cross are now too numerous to describe, although many of them have their distinct symbolic meanings. As examples we may mention two which have

developed almost within our own day : the Victoria Cross, given for valour, which, instituted less than a century ago, has made a small Maltese cross in bronze the most coveted decoration of an Englishman ; and the plain Greek cross in scarlet on a white ground formerly worn by the Knights Hospitallers of S. John, the Red Cross *par excellence*, which, mainly through the life and labours of Florence Nightingale, has become the protecting sign of all those wounded for their country.

In conjunction with the cross we very soon find the circle, which, having no beginning or ending, represented eternity, completeness, perfection, and, in some ancient religions, the First Cause or God, from whom all things came forth. The circle, as a symbol of the sun, represented life and the source of life. The cross combined with the circle is still a favourite symbol with us, being used both inside and outside churches, in mosaics, vestments, and on the covers of sacred books.

One very ancient form of the cross-and-circle symbol has been revived of late years, in most cases bereft of its meaning. We hear to-day of Swastika laundries, Swastika athletic clubs, and we see the swastika hanging from watch-chains or fastened to bicycles and motor-cars as a mascot.

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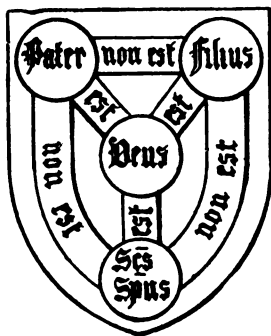
It was originally a development, or perhaps it would be more correct to say an abbreviation, of the cross and circle, which to the Christian symbolized the power of the Cross through eternity, and to the Buddhists and other Eastern peoples life, particularly productive life. In at least one Catacomb picture it appears on the garment of the Good Shepherd. It persisted for a long time in England as a sacred symbol; an example of its use may be seen on the brass of a priest in Shottesbrook Church of about the year 1370, where alternate swastikas and roses make an effective border to the chasuble, and are also used to decorate the amice, orphreys, and stole. It is difficult to find a reason for its reintroduction as a popular charm, unless it is due to the fact that it appears beside the "R.K." on the title-pages of Mr. Kipling's books.

Three circles interlaced are used to represent the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, as one sometimes symbolizes GOD the FATHER. A simple and beautiful example of this symbol, which might well be revived in modern ecclesiastical art, occurs in a French thirteenth-century manuscript in the library of Chartres.

The Church would have done well to keep to geometric symbols in her representations of the Blessed Trinity. These showed forth all that

could be shown of the Trinity in Unity, and the eternal truth of the Mystery ; whereas the later attempts at anthropomorphic representations—such as heads with three faces, bodies with three heads, three figures standing side by side—are seldom other than grotesque. A very early symbol, which we still possess, is the equilateral triangle, an object which, being one, yet three, is alike in every particular and indivisible. It is only natural that this also should be linked with the circle to express the eternal character of the Blessed Trinity. Another development of the triangle symbol was two equilateral triangles interlaced, which further emphasized the characteristics of the Blessed Trinity, or which may possibly have symbolized also the trinity of man, body, soul, and spirit, unable to exist apart from the Trinity of God. This is the symbol alluded to in the Old Testament as the “shield of David,” and it is still frequently used by the Jews. On the coins of Edward I the king’s head was placed within an equilateral triangle, which possibly had the same meaning as the words “Edward, by the grace of God.”

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the triangle and circle symbolism reached its most elaborate form in a device which is fairly familiar to us from stained-glass windows and memorial



brasses. Three circles containing the words *Pater*, *Filius*, and *Spiritus Sanctus* were placed at the corners of an equilateral triangle, and at its centre another circle with the word *Deus*. The outer circles were linked by the words *non est*, while each was linked

to the centre by the word *est*; so that the negative and positive truths concerning the Blessed Trinity were expressed in a clear and memorable form. Here we have an excellent example of the chief aim and use of symbolism; for which is easier to remember—such a diagram as this, simple enough to be clear to a child, yet sufficiently complex to appeal to a developed intelligence, or the Athanasian Creed?

We cannot leave the symbolism of the circle without an allusion to Dante's marvellous picture in the last Canto of the *Paradiso*, when he beheld the highest heaven as circles of living light:—

“In that abyss

Of radiance, clear and lofty, seemed, methought,  
Three orbs of triple hue, clipt in one bound;  
And, from another, one reflected seemed,  
As rainbow is from rainbow; and the third  
Seemed fire, breathed equally from both.”

One last word. I suppose that Albert Durer's picture of the Adoration of the Blessed Trinity is incontestably the greatest attempt ever made to paint such a subject. It opens, as nearly as man could do, a gate into infinity. But a brief glance shows us that the artist, like the poet, was not ashamed to build the main lines of his composition upon a framework of elementary symbolism. The figures of the Blessed Trinity are planned upon equilateral triangles, and the worshippers are massed upon arcs of immense circles surrounding them—a striking proof that the study of elementary symbols may lead mankind to a wonderful realization of heavenly verities.



## CHAPTER III

*FLOWERS OF THE FIELD*

“O all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the LORD : praise Him and magnify Him for ever.”

OF all flowers the rose has the most numerous and widespread symbolic meanings. Inhabiting every country of the northern hemisphere, it has always been loved by mankind for its perfection of form and colour; and this beauty, together with the obvious suggestion of its thorns, has long made it a favourite simile with the poets. Zoroaster wrote that until evil entered the world the rose had no thorns. Thorns or no thorns, however, the Church has followed Solomon's wonderful imagery in taking the Rose of Sharon as the perfect flower, the symbol of our LORD; also remembering, perhaps, Isaiah's prophecy that the desert should blossom as the rose. To Isaiah too we are indebted for another aspect of rose symbolism, for the Branch of the Stem of Jesse is sometimes represented in Christian art by the rose. By the

fifteenth century, however, the rose had come to stand not so much for our LORD as for His Mother, as many carols of that period bear witness :—

“There is no rose of such virtue  
As is the rose that bare JESU,  
*Alleluia !*

For in this rose containèd was  
Heaven and earth in little space,  
*Res miranda !*”

And again—

“Of a rose singē we  
*Misterium mirabile.*

This rose is red of colour bright,  
Through whom our joy began alight,  
Upon a Christēs mass night,  
*Claro David germine.*

Of this rose was CHRIST ybore,  
To save mankind that was forlore,  
And us all from sin its sore,  
*Prophetarum carmine.*

This rose, of flowers she is the flower,  
She will not fade for no shower,  
To sinful men she sent succour,  
*Mira plenitudine.*

This rosē is so fair of hue,  
In maid Mary that is so true,  
Yborne was LORD of all virtue,  
*Salvator sine crimine.”*

This symbolism is brought back to our minds by at least one modern hymn, typically modern in connecting three ancient images in paradoxical

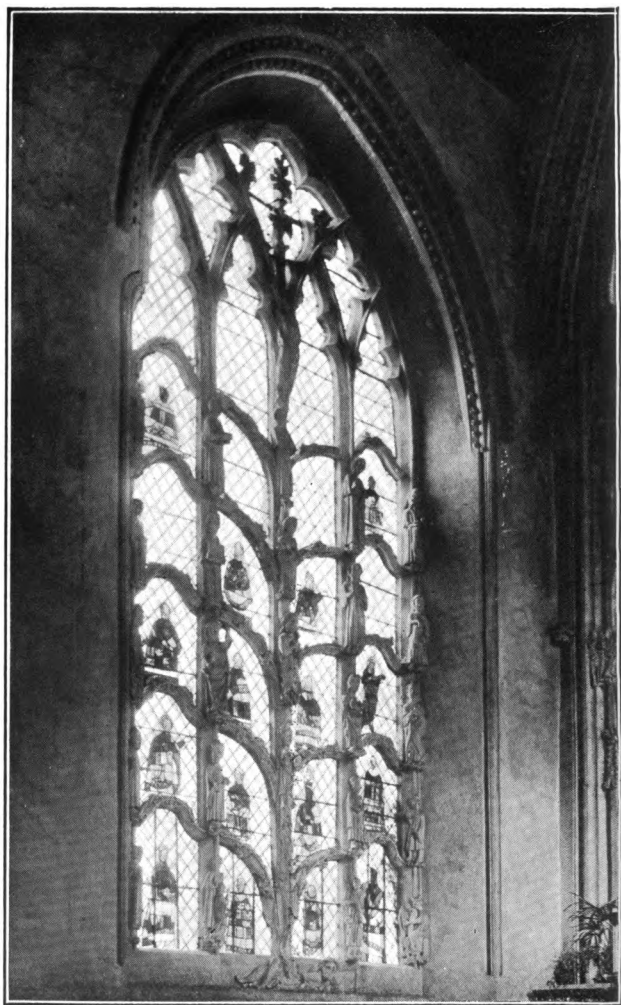
form which our ancestors, with deeper humility, would have preferred to consider one at a time.

“Fruit of the mystic rose,  
As of that rose the stem ;  
The root whence mercy ever flows,  
The Babe of Bethlehem.”

The rose is embroidered upon vestments, carpets, and hangings; carved upon fonts and upon every other vantage-ground of the decorator's craft; and it blossoms abundantly in stained-glass windows and illuminated books. Botticelli enthrones the Madonna in a rose-garden; Fra Angelico, crowning his angels with roses, sees them at play in Paradise with rose-wreaths in their hands; Dante's heaven is a golden rose.

Apart from the Church's symbolism of the rose, other meanings become attached to it which may have increased its popularity with the English people. It is a heraldic flower—the red rose of the Lancastrians, and the white rose of the Yorkists and of the house of Stuart. Tudor architecture can be distinguished to a great extent by the free use of the rose in its decoration. In the reign of Edward VI the rose appeared on the great seal of England, and was retained by all succeeding monarchs down to James II. But red and white roses





[Photo, Taunt.

*THE JESSE WINDOW, DORCHESTER ABBEY, OXON.*

have meanings nearer to the hearts of the people. Some old lines bid a bride—

“Take this flower from me  
(A white rose fitting for a wedding-gift),  
And lay it on thy pillow. Pray to live  
So fair and innocently ; pray to die  
Leaf after leaf, so softly.”

In South Wales white roses are planted on the graves of those who die young, and red on the graves of those noted for their charity—a development of the red rose’s significance of love. The boughs of brambles, wild rose, or sweet brier, were formerly used for binding new-made graves. As Jeremy Taylor says—“Summer gives us green turf and brambles to bind upon our graves.”

The Tree of Jesse was an exceedingly popular symbol in the Middle Ages, and grew in pictured windows, on vestments, and manuscripts. Once, at least, at Dorchester Abbey, the tree appears in stone as the tracery of a window. A Westminster Abbey inventory of the year 1540 speaks of “A cope of blewe velvett rychely embrothered with a Jesse, the ymages of the Jesse beyng garnysshed with perle.” The figure of Jesse lies at the foot of such representations, and the tree, foliated with rose or vine, grows from him, its fruits being “ymages” of the royal persons

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named in S. Matthew's genealogy, culminating usually in the Blessed Virgin with our LORD in her arms, or, more rarely, with the rood.

The Tree of Life sometimes appears in ancient decorations, though the legends of it, tracing it through many vicissitudes from the seeds sown in Adam's mouth at his death to its final triumph as the wood of the Cross, the "Tree of glory, tree most fair" of the old hymn, are too numerous for representation. In Amiens Cathedral there is an old sculpture (if it has been spared by the Germans) showing the "trees of good and evil," the one bearing lamps, symbols of good deeds, and the other having withered branches and the axe already laid to its root.

The lily is a favourite flower in ecclesiastical art of all ages. Its exquisite simplicity of form, and the purity of its white petals (the *lilium candidum* of our gardens may be taken as the original symbolic flower) suggest it at once as the symbol of Blessed Mary and all virgins. Mediaeval artists loved to put it into the hand of Mary herself or of Gabriel; and thus we have grown to associate this stately flower with the Feast of the Annunciation. At Easter also we use it as the crown of the bridal white which the Church assumes at the Queen of Feasts, together with the Arum (not a true lily) and

other lesser lilies—daffodils, for example, which at that time burst their earthen sepulchres.

The snowdrop, which first appears about the Feast of the Purification, is also emblematic of purity, and in some countries has become closely connected with the Blessed Virgin and also with S. Agnes, about whose day it may be in bloom. Many will remember Tennyson's lines in *S. Agnes's Eve* :—

“ Make Thou my spirit pure and clear,  
As are the frosty skies,  
Or this first snowdrop of the year  
That in my bosom lies.”

Most members of the lily family have, from their formation, been used at one time or another as symbols of the Trinity, their floral diagrams showing very clearly the old figure of the circle and the interlaced triangles. The *fleur-de-lis*, or conventionalized lily, is still a favourite Trinity symbol.

The plant which most obviously and most usually symbolizes the Blessed Trinity is the shamrock. Every one knows that from this plant S. Patrick taught the doctrine of the Triune God ; but it has not been finally decided whether the trefoil he used was the leaf of the white clover or of medick, or of the wood-sorrel, which our forefathers called the Alleluia



flower, probably because it shows its delicate blossoms about Easter. Many antiquaries incline to the last-named, which is common in the damp woods of Ireland, and is often in bloom by S. Patrick's Day. A variety of clover grown in gardens is called Calvary clover, because its leaflets bear a purple mark as though stained with blood. In the Balearic Islands this plant is known as *Corona di Cristo*, because the marks on the three leaflets are thought to resemble our LORD'S Crown of Thorns.

It is difficult to find out when the daisy came by its more dignified title of *Margherita*, *Marguerite*, or pearl; though it is generally associated with S. Margaret of Antioch, about whose day (July 20th) our English fields are as thick with moon-daisies as the Milky Way with stars. It is said that S. Augustine of Canterbury, inspired by the Kentish meadows in spring time, fell on his knees, exclaiming "Behold, a hundred pearls, with the radiance of a living sun in each! So may the spirits of the blest shine in heaven!" During a famous sermon, seeing in the crowd a small boy holding a daisy-chain, he called him and said "The sun has imaged himself in the centre of each of these flowers, as the Sun of Righteousness will image Himself in

each of your hearts. From this sun in the daisy white rays spread round. So may the rays of purity and goodness spread around you, reflected from the light of heaven within you. And as these flowers are strung together in a chain so may you in England be united to each other, and to the holy churches of the world, by a chain that shall never be broken."

This same sermon was probably known to Dante, for he sees in Paradise S. Benedict and S. Francis, accompanied by lesser saints as—

"A hundred little spheres, that fairer grew  
By interchange of splendour."

Even without the aid of preacher and poet, who could help learning much from the daisy, the flower whose purity and innocence are touched with the rosy hues of love, and which ever gazes at heaven, reflecting the sun.

The plant which first became familiar in Christian art was probably the palm. Before the days of Christianity it was the emblem of the kingdom of Judaea. Palm Sunday sanctified it as the sign of glory, and it soon became the badge of martyrs. As such it appears very frequently in the Catacombs, and through the great days of the Church's art it is always seen in the hands of those who have won the martyr's crown. But the palm has other claims to our

consideration as a Christian symbol. It is tall and upright, a fruit-bearing and a shady tree, growing by sweet water-springs and continuing long. Thus it provides the weary traveller with food, drink, and rest. It will not grow crooked, though heavy weights be placed upon it; but flourishes more the more it is oppressed. For this reason Mary Queen of Scots adopted it as her badge; and it appears in the frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* with the following "Explanation of the Embleme":—

"Though clogged with weights of miseries,  
Palm-like depressed I higher rise."

Thus the palm symbolizes fruitfulness, constancy, steadfastness in the Christian life, and final victory.

It would take long to mention all the trees and flowers which have a part in Christian symbolism. The pomegranate, fig, and olive are other symbols of fruitfulness, the olive also denoting peace, plenty, and prosperity. The oak and the aramant speak of eternity, and the yew, a tree prominent in the ancient ritual of the Celts, or perhaps of Neolithic man, of immortality. Caxton tells us how the yew was carried in the procession of Palm Sunday—"But for that we have none olyve, therefore we take yew instead of palm olyve." The branches were

afterwards burnt, and the ashes kept for use on the next Ash Wednesday. The vine in pre-Christian times symbolized the chosen people, as we may learn from the beautiful parable of the Eightieth Psalm. Throughout the Christian era it has been the symbol—one might say the self-chosen symbol—of our LORD. But we shall consider it more fully in a later chapter as a symbol of the Holy Eucharist.

The passion flower was discovered in America by the Jesuits during the seventeenth century. They accepted its appearance in a heathen land as a miraculous showing forth of the truth of the Gospel. The ten petals, they said, represented the Apostles at the time of the Passion, when Judas had betrayed and S. Peter denied our LORD. The rays were our LORD's nimbus, the ovary was the hammer, the stamens were the nails, and the anthers were the five sacred wounds. The symbolism is, perhaps, overstrained; but the passion flower has, nevertheless, appeared to many simple people as a miracle.

We cannot leave the subject of symbolic flowers without a word as to the flowers of Christmas. Mistletoe is, of course, a survival of the old Celtic worship, and for that reason is seldom allowed in churches. The symbolism

of holly, with its "blossom as white as lily-flower," is beautifully told in the carol of "The Holly and the Ivy." The green boughs and the yule log are also (most probably) prehistoric survivals. Those who are interested in their origin could not do better than read the chapter on "Ceppo and Befana" in Professor Wood Brown's *Florence, Past and Present*; for in Florence the meanings as well as the customs have more clearly survived. The Christmas rose, with its obvious symbolism — a white flower coming to enlighten a wintry world—is said to have been called forth by Gabriel, in order that the little shepherd girl might have an offering to bring to the manger.

A whole book might be devoted to the flowers connected in one way and another with our LORD's Nativity: the yellow and white bedstraws, still called "Lady's bedstraws," which wove themselves into a tiny crown; the various sainfoins and cradle grasses which blossomed where they touched His little Body; the rosemary, which is sweetly-scented, since upon it His Mother, when she had washed His garments, laid them out to dry; and, lastly, the bracken, which, because it remained withered and crinkled in His bed, has never borne a flower. However, country people say that if





*BOOK OF HOURS. End of XV Cent.*

bracken-stems be cut across at certain points the marks of the pith show forth various emblems of the Passion.

It can be urged that these flowers are in no sense symbols. But I mention them because they may fill the world for us, as they did for our ancestors, with sacred and loving associations; so that every hedgerow, field, and haywain may call to mind some detail of the Gospel story. We find many flowers, birds, and beasts in ancient Church art to which no definite meaning can be attached; enough for the artists that they were beautiful. A border of a fifteenth-century Book of Hours in the British Museum<sup>1</sup> contains, for instance, wild strawberries, columbines, pansies, wild roses, and an oak-leaf and acorn; as well as a peacock, a snail, a butterfly not unlike the little azures of the chalk counties, a bee, and another small fly—all portrayed with wonderful accuracy and a fine disregard of proportion. The combination of peacock, snail, strawberry, and pansy occurs so frequently that it may once have conveyed some symbolic meaning. But to us the artist, if he intends to teach at all, seems to be saying that every flower, indeed, every living thing, is a symbol of the love of God.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 25698, p. 3.



## CHAPTER IV

*BIRDS, BEASTS, AND FISHES*

“O ye whales, and all that move in the waters . . . O all ye fowls of the air . . . O all ye beasts, and cattle, bless ye the LORD : praise Him, and magnify Him for ever.”

THE chiefest of bird symbols is the Dove, chosen by GOD the HOLY SPIRIT to represent Himself. This symbolism was clearly foreshadowed when, before the birth of man, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” and when, before the emergence of the cleansed world from the Deluge, the dove brought news of the abating flood. Nevertheless, the Hebrew symbol of the HOLY SPIRIT was not the dove but the eagle, and this use continued, in some cases, until the eleventh century after CHRIST. In the earliest Christian art, as in several examples in the Catacombs, the dove is used to represent not the HOLY SPIRIT, but the faithful Christian soul, sheltering beneath the arms of the Cross, or sitting on the arms and gazing at the sacred mono-

gram. Perhaps the artist, at least in the days of persecution, remembered the psalmist's cry, "Oh, that I had wings as a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest."

In spite of the definite statement of the Gospels that at the Baptism of our LORD the HOLY SPIRIT appeared in the form of a Dove, it was not until A.D. 359 that He was thus symbolized. In the wonderful bas-reliefs on the tomb of Junius Bassus, where all the persons depicted are in the form of sheep or lambs, is a representation of our LORD's Baptism, a lamb touching with his fore-foot the Lamb of God, upon whom rays are falling from a Dove. From that time forward the HOLY SPIRIT has almost invariably been represented by His chosen symbol.

The earliest known picture of the Annunciation is a mosaic in the fifth-century church of S. Maria Maggiore at Rome, and here the dove appears, touching the head of the Blessed Virgin. From that day to this there have been few pictures of the Annunciation in which the sacred dove has not appeared, either in the natural form, or nimbbed, or with rays of light proceeding from Him.

The dove appears in many other suggestive ways in the art of the first twelve centuries—

hovering over CHRIST, the Apostles or other saints ; sometimes with flames of fire or rays of light descending from Him ; sometimes holding the nimbus of our LORD ; and in one very early example hovering in a ring of stars (representing heaven) from which water descends upon a Goth who is being baptized. One wonders why in these latter days the dove is so rarely to be found on or near a font. Another beautiful thought of early times was to show Him sitting upon the shoulder of a saint, as if whispering inspiration in his ear. A famous example of this use is the thirteenth-century statue of Pope Gregory the Great in Chartres Cathedral. Imagining what effect this imagery would have upon the minds of children, and not children only, who saw it Sunday after Sunday, let us hope for the time when such simple graphic teaching shall again be more prominent in our churches.

Another early method of teaching the lessons of the HOLY SPIRIT was to represent the Seven Gifts of the Spirit by seven doves, circling round our LORD, the Madonna and Child, the Blessed Virgin alone, or a figure representing the Church. A thirteenth-century French manuscript in the British Museum shows a crowned and nimbed lady, holding a book and a cup, and with seven doves about her head. Could we

devise a more complete yet simple lesson of the power and dignity of the Church—the Bride of CHRIST, endowed by His Spirit, the Guardian of His Word and Sacraments? An English manuscript of slightly later date also shows the seven doves. Each on a scroll stands bearing the name of one gift. Around the page is written in the old character and spelling :—

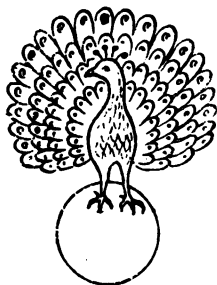
“In this desert wild and waste,  
Seven fowls are flying with flight,  
That are the seven gifts of the HOLY GHOST,  
That nowhere but in clean hearts will light,  
And dwell there if they find them chaste,  
And give them ghostly strength and might,  
So big and bold that they then haste  
To pray to God both day and night.”

It was perhaps typical of the Jewish faith as compared with the Christian that the former should see the Spirit of God as the fierce, soaring eagle rather than as the gentle persuasive dove. In a few cases this use has survived, as for instance on the ceiling of St. Alban's Abbey, where an eagle, nimbed, is painted on the roof, a companion to the lamb as representing the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. A window in the ante-chapel of Lincoln College, Oxford, shows Elisha with a two-headed eagle, evidently representing the “double portion” of the Spirit; and a Saxon manuscript in the British

Museum portrays David holding his harp, while an eagle on his shoulder is apparently putting words in his mouth—a parallel idea with that of Pope Gregory and the dove in Chartres Cathedral. It may have been on account of this old symbolism that an eagle was and is so often chosen to form the lectern in our churches. Milton's scornful reference to "buzzard idols" was probably suggested by eagle lecterns.

Nowadays we seldom see an eagle used symbolically except to represent S. John the Divine. But for many years, as the bird which soars heavenward and fixes its gaze on the sun, it was used almost universally as a symbol of the Resurrection. An English example of this is to be seen on an old church at Bitton in Gloucestershire. Only the two feet of our LORD are visible, while the head and wings of the eagle follow them upwards. A window in Lyons Cathedral shows a picture of the Ascension side by side with another of a parent eagle teaching her children to fly towards the sun.

It is curious that two very early symbols of the Passion and Resurrection were also birds. The pelican, which was said to bring its young to life, and to feed them with its own blood, was a favourite symbol of the Passion, though now it represents more generally the Blessed Sacrament



*THE PEACOCK.*



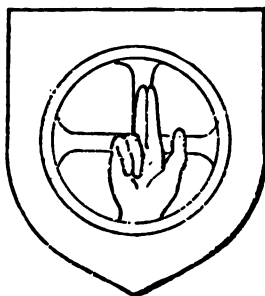
*THE COCK.*



*THE PHENIX.*



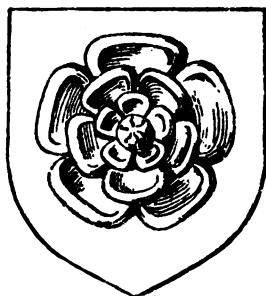
*THE LAMB ON THE BOOK  
WITH SEVEN SEALS.*



*THE HAND WITH A NIMBUS.*



*THE PELICAN.*



*THE ROSE.*



and Corpus Christi. The phoenix is mentioned by Tertullian as a symbol of the Resurrection. According to the ancient myth (which Tertullian in all good faith accepted) this strange bird lived for a thousand years, and then, after building itself a funeral pyre of costly spices which it fanned to flame with its wings, burnt itself to death, to arise from the ashes a new phoenix, prepared for another millenium of existence.

Another favourite bird-symbol of early times, which we mention here because it was often associated with the phoenix, was the peacock. We have been taught by later moralists to associate this wonderfully beautiful bird with vanity and conceit, and certainly the peacock's voice and gait do not suggest humility. But to the infant Church it represented Immortality, partly because it renewed its beautiful plumage every year, and partly because its flesh was supposed to be incorruptible. It was a popular subject with the artists of the Catacombs, who, finding the Christian life more dangerous and difficult than we can ever realize, dwelt with rather pathetic insistence on the joyful side of religion, and the hope of everlasting life.

Various other birds were used symbolically by the old teachers, though none so frequently as



those already mentioned. The cock, for example (apart from its connection with the Passion, of which we shall speak later), represented vigilance, and also "the company of preachers, which do preach sharply, do stir up the sleepers to cast away the works of darkness, which also do foretell the coming of the light, when they preach of the Day of Judgement and of future glory."

The owl appears occasionally as the sign of mourning and desolation ; for instance, in one of Perugino's altar-pieces of the Crucifixion. The raven, from the days of Noah onward, has been associated with wandering and unrest, and was occasionally depicted on a bough of the Tree of Evil. The swan, when seen apart from S. Cuthbert or S. Hugh of Lincoln, represented hypocrisy, for the flesh beneath its snowy plumage was said to be black. To leave the birds' contribution to Christian teaching with a very beautiful symbol, we may mention the hen and chickens, which sometimes appears in old sculptures to remind us of God's protecting care and love, which might have been extended to Jerusalem—"and ye would not."

In the Middle Ages nearly every beast known and imagined was accepted as a symbol of some virtue or vice. Pre-eminent, of course, was the Lamb of God, which was for some seven centuries

almost the only representation permitted of our LORD. In the Catacombs He was frequently shown in an allegorical form as the Good Shepherd, but any attempt at portrayal would have been considered grossly irreverent, and until the Council of Constantinople decreed in A.D. 692 that "our LORD JESUS CHRIST should be shown hereafter in His human form in the images" the figure of a Lamb carved or painted upon the Cross, as we may see it now on a modern processional cross at S. Paul's Cathedral, was the nearest approach to a crucifix. We shall say more of the Lamb in considering the symbols of the Eucharist ; but the popularity of this, which we may call one of the Self-chosen symbols, and of the Good Shepherd led the Catacomb artists into their curious custom of portraying many other persons as sheep, a custom which reached its culmination upon the tomb of Junius Bassus, already mentioned, where every person is represented as a lamb or a sheep.

The lion has always been conspicuous in fables, mythology, and symbolism. In these days it is associated chiefly with S. Mark, but formerly it sometimes appeared as our LORD, the Lion of the tribe of Judah ; as the devil, "seeking whom he may devour" ; as fortitude, courage, and all brave virtues. It was also a favourite symbol of the

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Resurrection, for according to an ancient belief lion cubs were born dead and brought to life on the third day by the rough tongue or the roaring of their sire.

Another creature having both good and evil associations is the serpent. Sometimes it is the symbol of wisdom, in remembrance of our LORD's advice to the Apostles to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Sometimes we see a serpent wound about a *tau* cross—the sign of healing raised by Moses in the wilderness to foretell that "even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." But more commonly, perhaps, it is "that old serpent, the devil and Satan," entwining himself round a world which despite his coils is surmounted by the cross. In France and other countries which have not been ravaged by the spirit of Protestantism it is not uncommon to see great Calvaries or wayside crucifixes standing thus upon a painted globe. As a child I was deeply impressed by the sight of such a Calvary at Cancale, near to St. Malo, and still more by the explanation of a Bretonne about my own age who told me, as well as our lack of a *lingua franca* would permit, that the serpent and the globe served not only to show that CHRIST had conquered evil, but also to raise up the Calvary so that it could be seen from all over the harbour





THE DRAGON OF THE APOCALYPSE. Early XIV Cent.

and the *parcs* (the oyster-beds for which Cancale is famous); and that at night the light of the lanterns swinging from the arms of the cross were visible to fishermen far out in the bay. This Calvary replaced an ancient one before which, some fifty years ago, Joseph Camu, *curé* of Cancale, offered his life in a time of stress and famine for the lives of his people. The disease left the *parcs*, fish flocked back to the bay, and in less than a year the *curé* was dead.

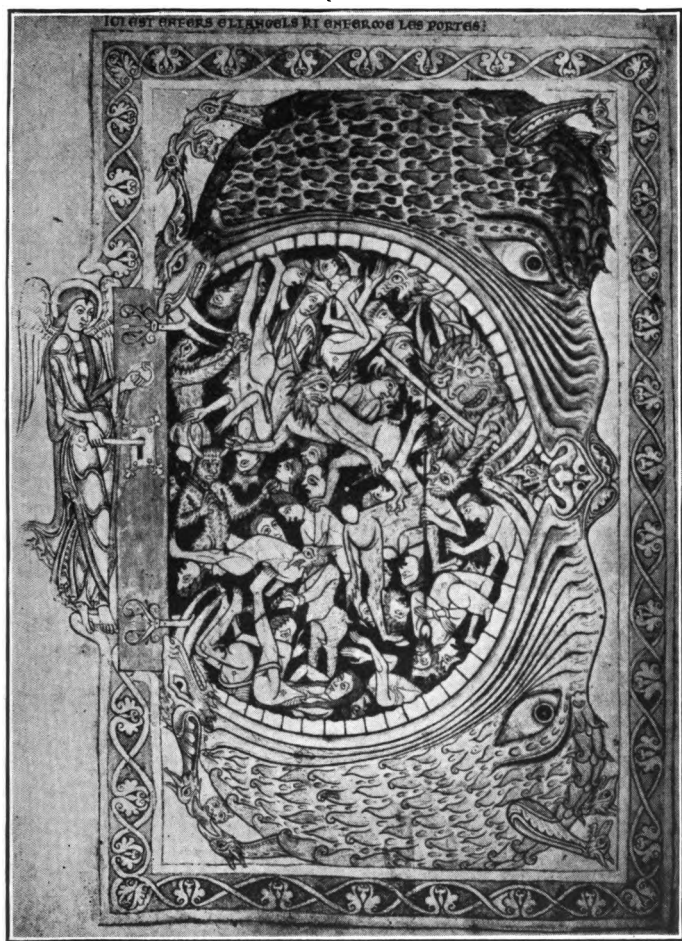
It is but a short step from the serpent to the dragon, especially as ancient tradition accorded him, before the temptation, two little feet and a human face. As the serpent, "more subtil than any beast of the field," became not merely the tempter of the woman but a monster upon whom Michael himself made war, he developed all the attributes of legendary beasts, and thus we meet him, especially in mediaeval works of art, endowed with the terrors of teeth and talons, wings and tail, breathing out fire and smoke. A very quaint fourteenth-century manuscript in the British Museum shows "un angel descendant du ciel qui ad la clef de abysme."<sup>1</sup> The angel leads a subdued dragon by a slender ribbon round his neck, and is apparently showing him the way through an open door to a house across

<sup>1</sup> Royal MS. 15 D ii, ff. 172, 194.

the street, while a saint standing by gives him a parting benediction. Far more ferocious is another dragon to be seen in the British Museum, this time of the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> Here we have only a tremendous head with wide-open jaws, figuring, according to a favourite notion of mediaeval artists, the mouth of hell. Fangs, eyes, and flame-like scales occupy a large part of the picture, and from the large head spring various lesser heads of dragons, tearing at any prey which comes within their reach. Inside the "devouring depths of hell" there are numerous horrible demons, rending the bodies of their victims. Such a picture makes one realize that our forefathers' fear of hell was not far removed from the propitiation of evil spirits still practised by savage races. But there is this great difference: the old artist completed his picture of hell by putting in the margin an angel, who with a large key securely locks away the horrors within, and it is just this feeling of security that our missionaries labour to carry into the dark places of the earth.

We have left to the end of this chapter a symbol which was, perhaps, the earliest, and for many years the most popular, representative of

<sup>1</sup> Cotton MS. Nero C. iv, f. 39.



# THE MOUTH OF HELL.

*From a twelfth century Psalter, S. Swithun's Priory, Winchester.*





our LORD—the fish. This was one of the anagram-symbols mentioned earlier in this book ; for the letters of the Greek word for fish are the initial letters of the words “JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, SAVIOUR,” so that a drawing or sculpture of a fish was to the Christian a small creed. This, in spite of its lack of dignity, was one of the best-known symbols in the Latin Church, being engraved on rings and gems, on tombs and in places of worship. It is odd that although this symbol was derived from a coincidence of Greek letters the Greek Church has never adopted it.

The fish, like the cross and the eye, was sacred to the Egyptians in pre-Christian days. A fragment from an early Christian grave at Ahkmim shows the Blessed Virgin and the Infant CHRIST, the latter having a child's head and the body of a fish.

In later times the use of this symbol of our LORD died out in favour of more dignified and beautiful emblems, such as the lion and the lamb. But a curious use of it survived in the thirteenth century. On a seal of Aberdeen Cathedral is a bas-relief of the Nativity, the shepherds adoring round the manger, in which lies a little fish. After seeing this we are not surprised that the fish-symbol only remains as the *vesica piscis*,

the shape so frequently chosen for ecclesiastical medallions, badges of Church Guilds (that of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament occurs to me as a well-known example), and for episcopal seals.

The value of symbolic teaching was realized, and at the same time half-killed, by Durandus, who in the thirteenth century wrote the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, a minute and over-strained explanation of the symbolism of churches and all that they contain, even to the meaning of the iron cramps by which the bells are joined to their wooden frames. Three centuries later we are told by one Gherard, a Franciscan, that the celebrant entered the church between the deacon and subdeacon to signify that "our LORD was born and laid between the ox and the ass," an interpretation which the deacon and subdeacon might justly resent. However, it furnishes a necessary warning to keep our symbolism within reasonable bounds.

To our ancestors the ox represented humble and patient toil for GOD ; and the ass, far from being called obstinate or foolish, was regarded as specially honoured, his back being marked with the cross in memory of the numerous occasions on which he served our LORD. The ancient Palm Sunday hymn "All glory, laud, and

honour" uses the ass symbolically in a wonderful way :—

“Be Thou, O LORD, the rider,  
And we the little ass,  
That to the heavenly city  
Together we may pass.”

But because we are not yet become as little children this verse has for several centuries generally been omitted.

## CHAPTER V

*THE EUCHARIST AND THE PASSION*

“Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,  
Which my God feels as blood ; but I, as wine.”

*G. Herbert.*

OUR forefathers recognized so clearly the Eucharist as an extension of the Passion that it is not always easy to distinguish between the symbols of these two mysteries. Thus we find the pelican tearing her own breast to feed her young with her flesh and blood used sometimes to represent our LORD's one Sacrifice on Calvary for the salvation of the world, and at other times to show forth His continual giving of His life to the faithful through the Blessed Sacrament. To-day the latter interpretation is, perhaps, the more common. A Lenten frontal recently designed for the Church of the Corpus Christi College Mission bears a pelican on a scarlet shield, probably intended by the artist as an emblem of the Passion and also as an allusion to the title of the church. The pelican



Photo, Taunt.]

*BENCH ENDS IN CUMNOR CHURCH, BERKSHIRE,  
SHOWING EMBLEMS OF THE PASSION.*



is frequently carved upon the doors of tabernacles, and occurs often in coloured windows and church embroideries. In S. Thomas Aquinas's Eucharistic hymn "Thee we adore, O hidden Saviour," he wrote—

"Pelican of Pity, JESUS, LORD and GOD,  
Cleanse us, unclean, with Thy most precious Blood,"

but later translators have substituted "Fountain" for "Pelican."

The pelican is, however, a comparatively late symbol, and the association of the Passion and the Blessed Sacrament appears very early in the Church's history. Much has been said already of the popularity of the lamb as a symbol in the Catacombs. By degrees the lamb was more and more associated with the idea of sacrifice, and in the sixth century we find the lamb actually represented upon the cross itself, the earliest form of crucifix; and almost at the same time the lamb is shown lying upon an altar. After a time the lamb appears with a cross and a cup, or with blood pouring from his wounds. The famous "Holy Face of Lucca" is a crucifix which represents the CHRIST robed and crowned upon the Cross, and with His right foot resting in a chalice. A parallel piece of symbolism is the Van Eycks' wonderful picture of the Adoration of the Lamb

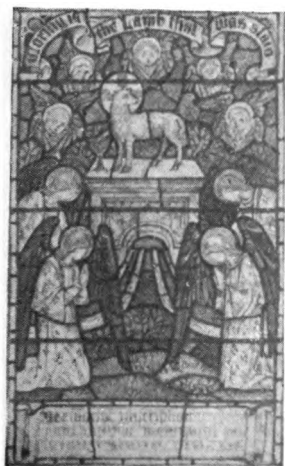
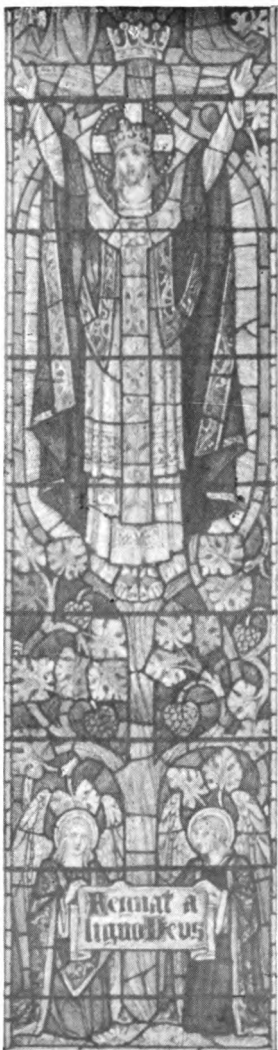
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—the Lamb standing upon an altar set in the midst of green pastures, blood pouring from His breast into a cup, while angels and arch-angels and the whole company of heaven unite to adore Him in the mystic Eucharist of the Revelation.

The old artists carried on the symbolism of the Jewish paschal sacrifice, and interpreted it in its highest meaning. A window recently placed in the beautiful little church of Ketton, near Stamford, is a modern version of this ancient teaching. The central subject is our LORD, robed and crowned as King, crucified upon a vine—"CHRIST reigning from the Tree." Beneath is the Lamb upon the altar, practically taken from the Van Eycks' picture. Above, two angels hold the chalice, and in the apex of the window is the pelican.

The Blessed Sacrament is in a sense the very summit of symbolism, the meeting-point of symbol and sacrament. It is probably for that very reason that so few symbols have been found to represent It. Bread (or corn) and the Vine, symbols which our LORD Himself used in His veiled teaching before "the same night that He was betrayed," are practically the only ones which have been thought meet to represent so great a mystery. In the Catacomb



**MEMORIAL WINDOW IN KETTON CHURCH,  
NEAR STAMFORD.**

gr 50.

[By permission of the Rev. A. H. Snowden.]



of S. Calixtus is a drawing of two baskets, one containing bread and the other a fish, which has been taken to represent the Host before and after the consecration. But such symbolism was quickly killed by its inadequacy, and the great Mystery was shown only by bread or corn, the vine or a cup. The corn may be understood merely as another form of bread, or it may be an allusion to our LORD's words "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die" as a foretelling of His own death, which should be the life of the world.

Nowadays we are less romantic, even in our symbolism, than were our forefathers. Instead of the corn and vine, good and perfect gifts from the FATHER of Lights, calling to mind fruitful hills and fields bathed in sunlight, we represent the Blessed Sacrament on banners, medals, and the like most usually by the chalice and wafer or paten, which are so nearly pictures in the photographic sense rather than symbols that they scarcely lead the mind to explore the deep truths which our LORD taught when He took the simplest things of earth to express the highest mysteries of heaven.

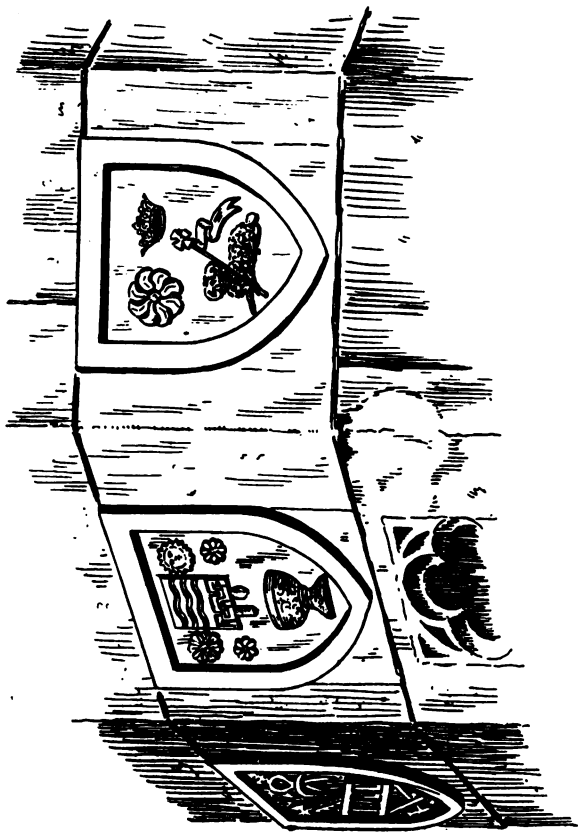
In this respect the symbols of the Eucharist are going through a development somewhat similar to that which the symbols of the Passion

suffered during the Middle Ages, when, for a time, it became customary to use not so much veiled symbols, but rather the instruments of the Passion as emblems. Sometimes these appeared on scutcheons within or without a church, as at St. Austell, on bench-ends (as at Cumnor), windows, tapestries, and manuscripts. We can imagine how the priest or monk would lead his scholars round the church and show them the swords and staves, the cock, the bandage, the scourge, the crown of thorns, S. Veronica's napkin, the cross and nails, the seamless garment and the dice, sponge and reed, lance and winding-sheet, over and over again, till every detail of the Passion was alive before their eyes. A fifteenth-century manuscript in the British Museum, which was reproduced a few years since, consists of twenty-four pictures of such emblems, each followed by a meditation and prayer in rough verse ; for example, beneath the thirty pieces of silver is written—

“The pence also that Judas told,  
Wherefore JESUS CHRIST was sold.  
LORD shield me from treason and covetousness,  
Therein that I die nowise.”

Beneath the lantern—

“The lantern in which they bear the light,  
When CHRIST was taken within the night.  
LORD, keep me from night's sin,  
That I never partake therein.”



EMBLEMS OF THE PASSION IN ST. AUSTELL CHURCH,  
CORNWALL.



And beneath the robe—

“Thine own coat that had seam none,  
The purple they laid lots upon.  
LORD, be my succour and my helping,  
That my body use not soft clothing.”

In connection with the emblems of the Passion we must not forget the so-called “empty cross,” another favourite device of the Middle Ages. It evidently indicated a lingering idea that to represent our LORD as dead was irreverent, or, perhaps, even the earlier idea that it was irreverent to present Him in His humanity at all. However, that may be, there are many such “empty crosses,” bearing all the emblems of the Passion, but not the figure of our LORD, scattered up and down Europe, of which that in Chartres Cathedral is the most famous.<sup>1</sup> The popularity of these emblems was probably increased by the numerous legends which gathered about them—the stories of the forging of the nails by a gipsy smith, of the spear with which the blind soldier Cassius (afterwards baptized as Longinus) pierced the sacred side, and by the Blood which flowed from thence, was healed of his blindness; and especially of the Cup used at the Last Supper, in which the waiting disciples caught our LORD’s

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment of this part of the subject reference may be made to the author’s work, *The Crucifix*, published by Messrs. A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd.



Blood, and which was afterwards brought to England by S. Joseph of Arimathea. Its later history is inextricably tangled with Celtic folklore, and though such legends must needs be often vague and contradictory, they are so full of mysticism and faith that they have inspired many saints in many centuries, and have done almost as much as any direct teaching of the Church to impress upon the young the need for cleansing and preparation of heart before receiving the Blessed Sacrament, that Cup which could only be seen by such as Galahad, whose strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure ; and Percival, "one of the best knyghtes that at that tyme was, in whome the veray feythe stood moost in."

## CHAPTER VI

*THE FATHER AND HIS HOUSE*

“All the earth doth worship Thee, the FATHER everlasting.  
... Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy  
Glory.”

THE Church has not limited herself to any one part of the universe in her search for symbols wherewith to teach the truths which she cherishes. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that she has not sought for symbols, but has read the hidden meanings of every part of creation, and is still doing so, and will continue to do until all her children realize that this world which seems so real to us now is but a veil to shield our eyes from the inexpressible beauty of God. So it comes to pass that there are many symbols which cannot, as it were, be sorted out and set under any particular heading. One of the most familiar and most beautiful of these is the hand, as representing GOD the FATHER. For eleven hundred years there was practically no other attempt to express the First Person of the Blessed Trinity,

and this hand of the LORD is amply justified from the Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament. It showed forth GOD as Creator : "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me" ; as FATHER and Protector : "Thou openest Thine hand and fillest all things living with plenteousness" ; as Judge : "The works of Thy hands are verity and judgement" ; as Conqueror : "His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory." Early pictures of our LORD's Baptism usually show the hand issuing from the clouds above the holy dove, and it appears in like manner in many pictures of the Annunciation. Very often too it appears above a sculptured or painted crucifix, outstretched as if to help the suffering Saviour. Often we find rays of light streaming from the hand, and as time went on it was usually shown in the attitude of blessing. The earliest known representation of it is on the tomb of Junius Bassus, which has been so often mentioned.

Another favourite symbol of GOD the FATHER was the eye, for which also there is ample justification in the Bible : "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous," and "the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." This symbol is, however, less expressive than the hand, and more difficult to

carve or draw, and is therefore far less frequent. Moreover, by the twelfth century art was becoming realistic, and men were losing that early reverence which forbade direct representations of God. God the FATHER began to appear in pictures as the head of an elderly bearded man, or by a half-length figure emerging from the clouds, and finally by the figure of a man. By this presumption art lost for the Church more than she gained. To portray CHRIST in His humanity is one task, to be approached with utmost reverence by artists, remembering that He was for thirty-three years before the eyes of men, and that traditions of His likeness have survived. But to attempt a reproduction on canvas, wood, or stone of the Beatific Majesty of the FATHER, in which He exists eternally, is a task of another order, and our forefathers were right in the instinct which made them veil beneath a symbol the Majesty of God.

Some other symbols which have come down to us from very early days are the trident, the anchor, and the ark or ship. The two first-named were forms under which Christians were wont to disguise the cross, and the anchor is still familiar to us as a symbol of hope, though we do not always remember its original significance—hope through the Cross of CHRIST. The conjunction

of cross, anchor, and heart to represent Faith, Hope, and Charity is a comparatively late idea. The ark and ship are very ancient symbols, representing the Church, and the word nave, the body of a church, being the same as the Latin *navis*, a ship, is a survival of this symbolism. The ship was nearly always depicted with a swelling sail, to show that it was wafted onwards by the breath or wind of the Spirit.

Durandus ascribed symbolic meanings to every part of a church, most of them very far-fetched, and therefore of no great value, at least from an educational point of view. It pleases us now to think that our churches are built in the form of a cross, but probably this is a natural development of the old basilican plan, transepts having been thrown out for convenience, or to strengthen a tower. Probably, too, it is due to natural development rather than to thought-out plan that our churches are so arranged now that to walk up them is symbolical of the Christian's journey through life: close to the door is the font, where the infant is baptized; next we pause at the chancel-steps, where the child is brought for Confirmation; and so to the altar itself, where the full-grown Christian receives eternal life. We are glad to think that God Himself guided our architects and builders to

this symbolic form, whether they evolved it consciously or unconsciously.

Similarly, it is probable that much of the furniture in our churches to which a symbolical meaning has been attached came there originally only because it was necessary. In the days of the Church's infancy, her services, in the Catacombs at all events, had to be conducted by candlelight. Was it not, perhaps, the inspiration of one worshipper, kneeling in some dim cave, that the two candles on the altar represented the two natures, human and divine, of the Light of the World? Be that as it may, the Church emerging from the shadows has loved to preserve both the teaching and the remembrance of those sorrowful days.

Some of the symbols which linger about our churches and churchyards are obviously pagan in their inception. Death, a skeleton with a sickle (as he appears, for instance, in a fourteenth-century window at West Wickham), the skull and crossbones so frequently seen on tombstones, the broken column and the funeral urn, are all relics of heathenism. The last two returned at the Renaissance with the revival of classic art, and lingered on through the slumber of the Church in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Symbolism and all the romance of religion was

apparently dead ; yet these travesties of it remained to terrify people still suffering from the poison of Calvinism, until at length the Church awoke to proclaim her old message that for Christians death has no sting and the grave no victory.

Our tendency nowadays is to become too hard and fast in the small amount of symbolism that remains to us. This is especially noticeable in the matter of ecclesiastical colours. It is certain that until a comparatively late period the Church simply used the best she could procure of hangings and vestments for GOD's service. If any parish or community possessed a choice of such treasures, the most beautiful would be used for great festivals and others for lesser occasions. There were no rules as to colour ; these arose later. When rules were made, they only applied to certain districts—the "uses," for instance, of Sarum, Exeter, and York are still known to us, and they differ in several particulars. The usual custom nowadays, as we all know, is to use white for Easter, Christmas, and feasts of Blessed Mary and other virgins and saints who were not martyrs ; red for Whitsun and feasts of martyrs ; violet or dark blue for fasts ; and green for ferial seasons. The symbolism in each case is fairly obvious. A beautiful custom is gradually

being revived of using white and red linen hangings instead of violet in Lent. Those who have seen a Lenten frontal of linen with a small scarlet design cannot but feel how much more in keeping with CHRIST's teaching on fasting it is than the gloomy violet, which seems to brag of its overwhelming sorrow and penitence.

There are those who scoff at our fastidiousness in regard to such details as the colours of curtains and frontals. But let them go day by day to a church through Holy Week, whose altar shows first in the white and red a certain glad poverty ; then on Maundy Thursday, in its plain white and gold, a subdued glimpse of future glory, like a nun arrayed in bridal garb for her profession ; then the nakedness of Good Friday and Easter Eve, bursting at the first Evensong of Easter into the glorious flower-decked festal white of the bride, the Lamb's wife. Thus we have words and music to teach our ears, and colours to teach our eyes. We must be hard indeed if the lesson does not reach our hearts.

So we return to the greatest lesson of any symbol, great or small : its importance as a fragment of the one great truth. When first we realize that there is a meaning behind a flower it becomes, as it were, a little message from God, clear to us though we could not perhaps explain



it to other people. The Church stands ready to teach us that behind such commonplaces as water, bread, and wine there lies, by the blessing of God, life eternal. We find earth as the garment of God, and as we touch reverently the hem of that garment virtue comes forth to us continually, so that the Hidden Presence is as real to us as the robe which is visible to our eyes. This knowledge has marked out prophets, poets, artists, musicians, from the beginning of the world, and made them transformers of other men. To such people, who are literally gifted with a second, spiritual sight—

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God.”

They are filled with joy, yet the pain of their lives is twofold—first, that they themselves cannot see all that they would; and secondly, that they can so seldom open the eyes of others to view that wondrous brighter world which lies about them.

No qualifications of wealth or learning are necessary for those who would enter this spiritual country. Perhaps the search for it entails rather a laying aside than a putting on, and much ancient symbolism has been lost because we have become less and less like little children and more like

Naaman, who would rather do some great thing than merely wash and be clean. There is a spirit abroad to-day which demands a complicated religion, and seems to desire difficulties in its search for God. John Keble, one of the greatest and most learned saints of these latter days, showing us the symbolism of the world, does not say that the learned alone shall read its meaning.

“There is a book, who runs may read,  
Which heavenly truth imparts,  
And all the lore its scholars need  
Pure eyes and Christian hearts.

The works of God above, below,  
Within us and around,  
Are pages in that book, to show  
How God Himself is found.

. . . . .

Two worlds are ours; 'tis only sin  
Forbids us to descry  
The mystic heaven and earth within,  
Plain as the sea and sky.

Thou, Who hast given me eyes to see  
And love this sight so fair,  
Give me a heart to find out Thee,  
And read Thee everywhere.”

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